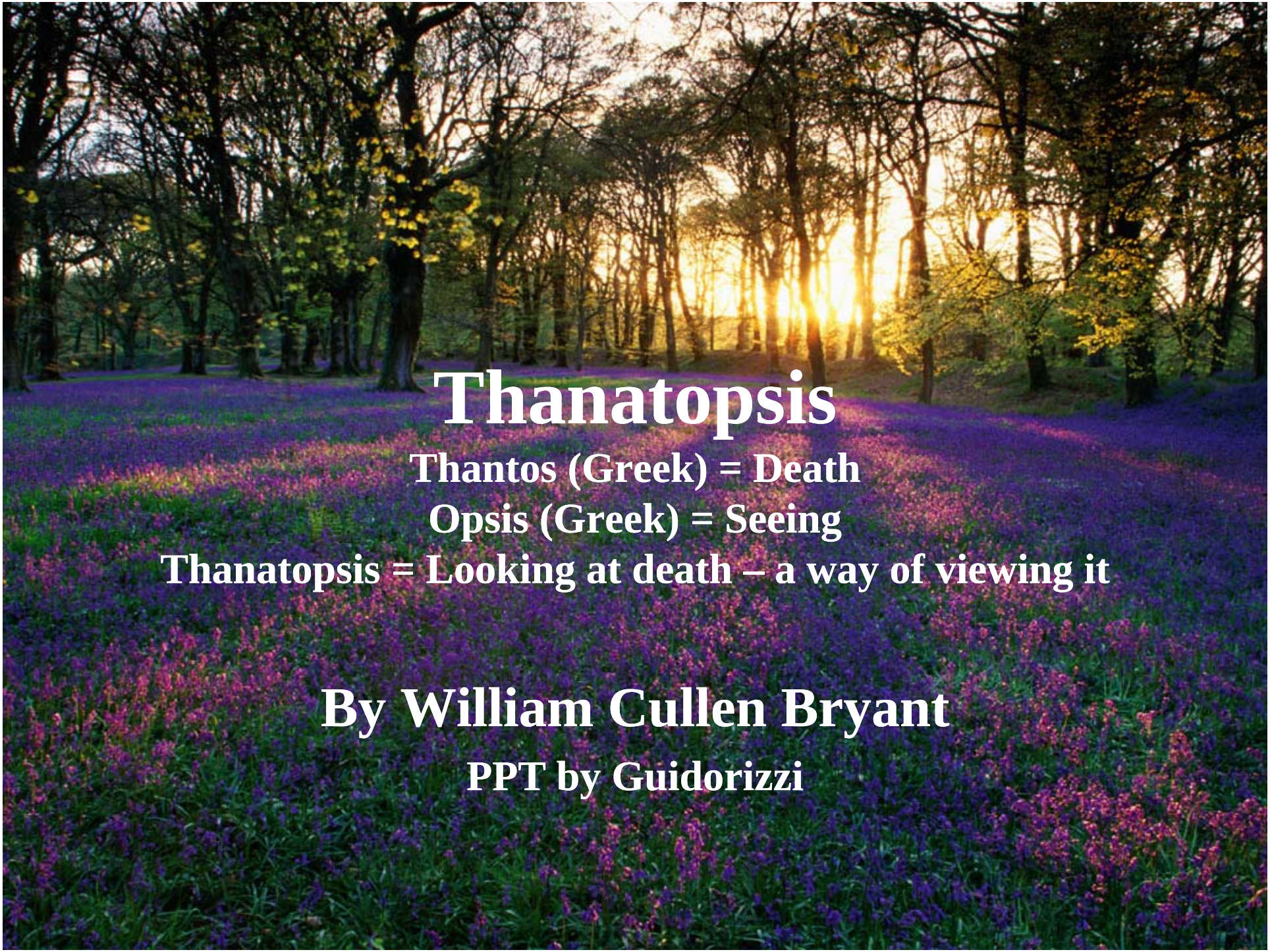


Thanatopsis

Thantos (Greek) = Death

Opsis (Greek) = Seeing

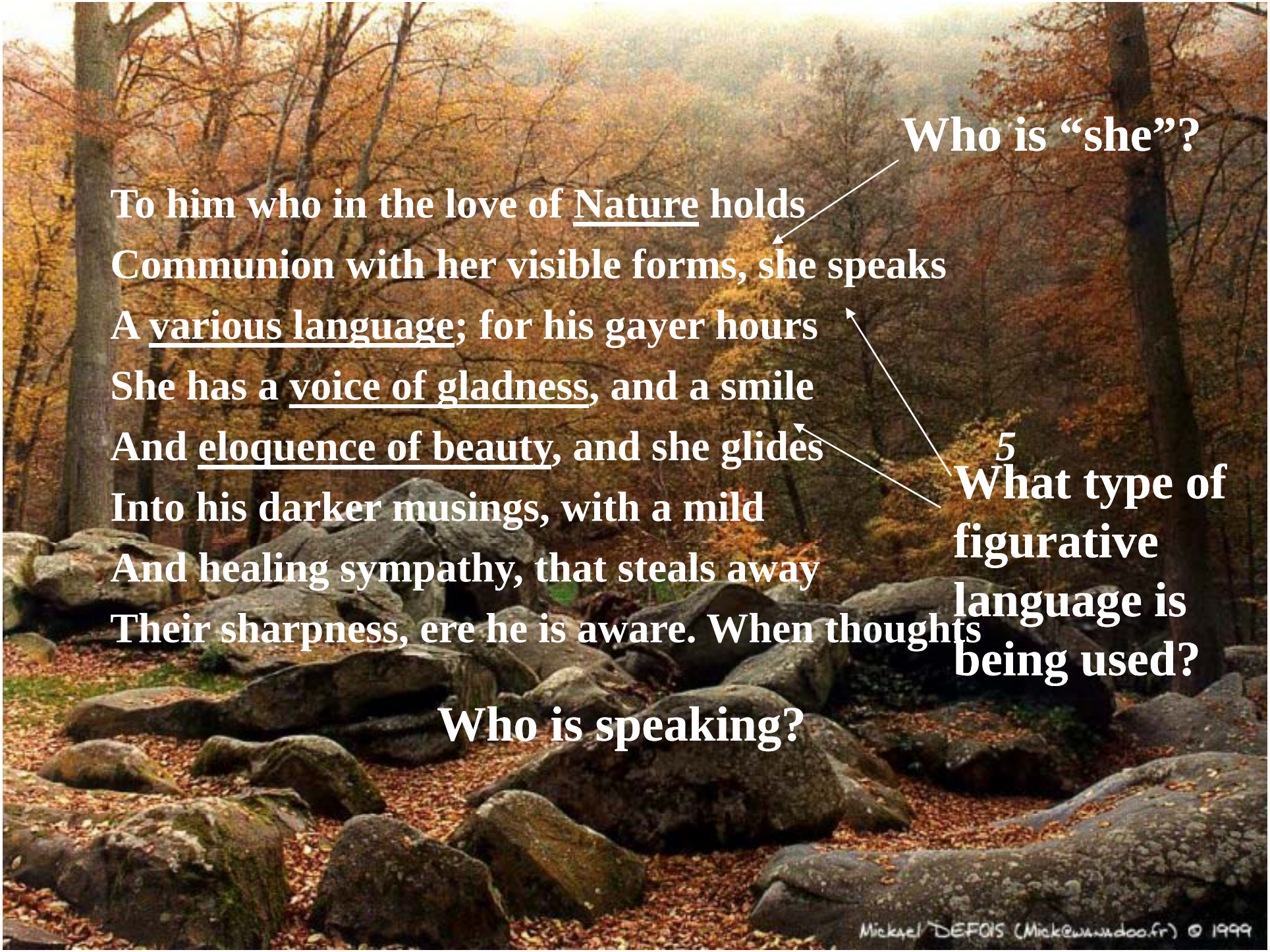
Thanatopsis = Looking at death – a way of viewing it

By William Cullen Bryant

PPT by Guidorizzi

Romanticism + Thanatopsis

- Draws moral lessons from nature (popular at the time)
- Bryant – speaking of Nature
- Reverence for Nature is an element of Romanticism



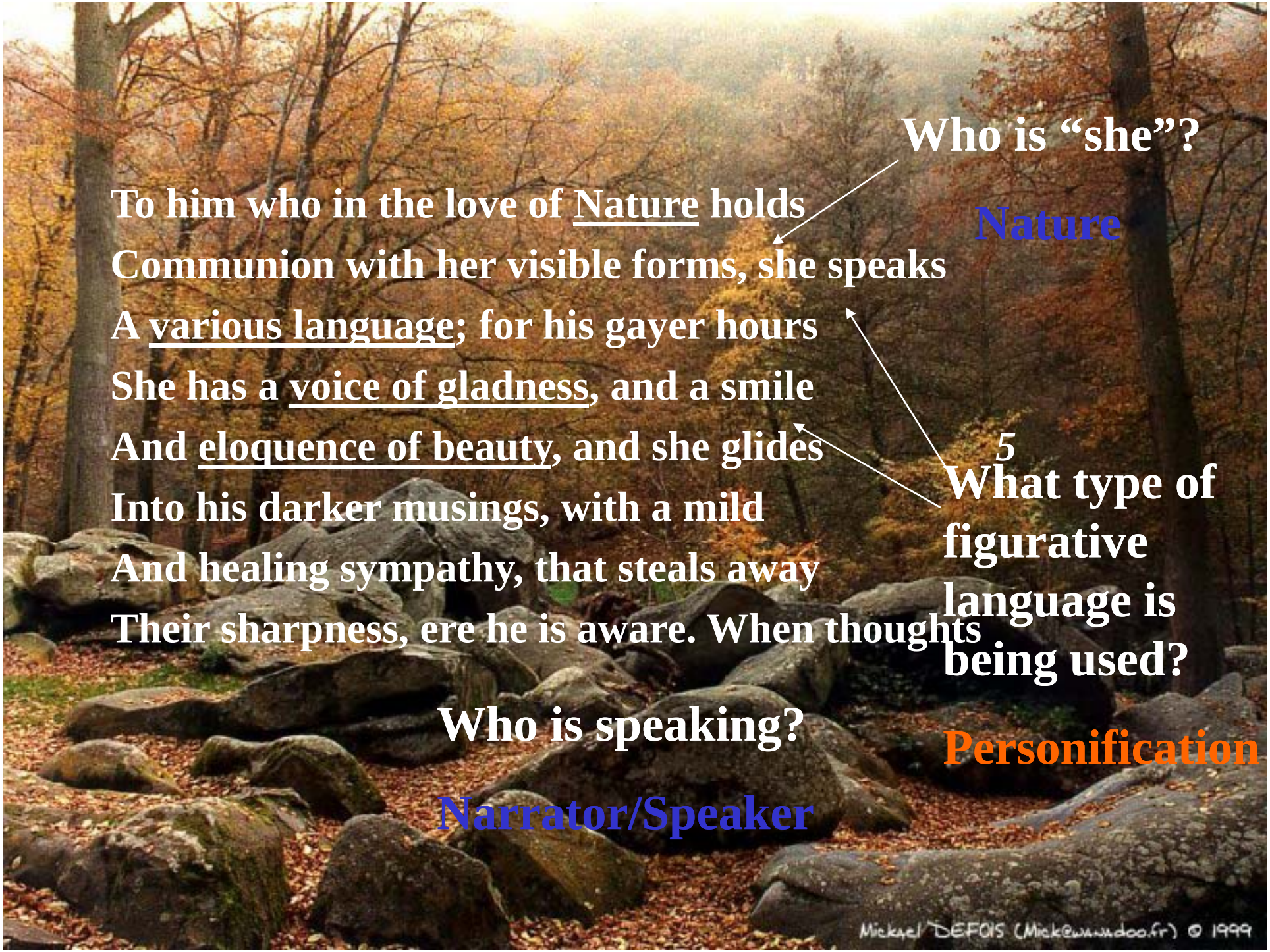
Who is "she"?

To him who in the love of Nature holds
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks
A various language; for his gayer hours
She has a voice of gladness, and a smile
And eloquence of beauty, and she glides
Into his darker musings, with a mild
And healing sympathy, that steals away
Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When thoughts

5

What type of figurative language is being used?

Who is speaking?



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Who is "she"?

Nature

5

What type of figurative language is being used?

Personification

Who is speaking?

Narrator/Speaker

Last bitter hour?

Blight = Impair, destroy

Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When **thoughts**

??? Of the last bitter hour come like a blight **???**

Over thy spirit, and sad images *10*

Cover for dead person and coffin

Of the **stern agony**, and **shroud, and pall**, **What do these images refer to?**

And breathless darkness, and the narrow house,

Make thee **to shudder, and grow sick at heart**;—

Go forth under the open sky, and list

To Nature's teachings, while from all around— *15*

Earth and her waters, and the depths of air— **What is the tone?**

What does the speaker suggest we do when we have these thoughts?

Last bitter hour? Final hour of life

Mortally Ill

Blight = Impair, destroy

Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When **thoughts**
Of the last bitter hour come like a blight
Over thy spirit, and sad images
Of the **stern agony**, and **shroud, and pall**,
And breathless darkness, and the narrow house,
Make thee **to shudder, and grow sick at heart**;—
Go forth under the open sky, and list
To Nature's teachings, while from all around—
Earth and her waters, and the depths of air—

Coffin

Cover for dead person and coffin

10

What do these images refer to? Death is a sickening thought

15

What is the tone? Sad and somber

What does the speaker suggest we do when we have these thoughts? Go outdoors and listen to Nature's teachings

Change in narration—who is speaking?

Comes a still voice—Yet a few days, and thee
The all-beholding sun shall see no more
In all his course; nor yet in the cold ground,
Where thy pale form was laid, with many tears, *20*
Nor in the embrace of ocean, shall exist
Thy image. Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim
Thy growth, to be resolved to earth again,
And, lost each human trace, surrendering up
Thine individual being, shalt thou go *25*
To mix forever with the elements;

What type of figurative language is being used?

What event is being discussed?

What is nature telling us?

Change in narration—who is speaking?

Nature is speaking

What type of figurative language is being used?

Personification

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Thine individual being, shalt thou go *25*
To mix forever with the elements;

What event is being discussed?

When a person is buried in the ground

What is nature telling us? In death, the earth reclaims you – mix with the elements

To **mix** forever with the elements;

To be a **brother** to the insensible rock,

And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain

Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak

Shall **send his roots abroad**, and **pierce thy mold**. *30*

Clod of dirt

Uneducated country youth

Plow

What is the section saying?

To **mix** forever with the elements; Clod of dirt

Uneducated country youth

To be a **brother** to the insensible rock,

And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain

Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak

Shall **send his roots abroad**, and **pierce thy mold**. *30*

Plow

What is the section saying? You will be dead and buried. Trees will grow around you, piercing you with roots (circle of life)

Why is this not pleasant? What's missing?

To **mix** forever with the elements;

To be a **brother** to the insensible rock,

And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain

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Clod of dirt

Uneducated country youth

Plow

What is the section saying? You will be dead and buried. Trees will grow around you, piercing you with roots (circle of life)

Why is this not pleasant? What's missing?

Heaven – dying without ceremony

What is this suggesting?

Tone Shift: ???

Yet not to thine eternal resting-place
Shalt thou retire alone, nor couldst thou wish
Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down
With patriarchs of the infant world,—with kings,
The powerful of the earth,—the wise, the good, *35*
Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,
All in one mighty sepulcher. The hills

What response does Nature have to those who fear the solitude or the indignity of death?

What is this suggesting?

We are not alone in death

Tone Shift: Optimistic

↳ **Yet not to thine eternal resting-place**
Shalt thou retire alone, nor couldst thou wish
Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down
With patriarchs of the infant world,—with kings,
The powerful of the earth,—the wise, the good, *35*
Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,
All in one mighty sepulcher. The hills

What response does Nature have to those who fear the solitude or the indignity of death? Nature insists that death puts one in the company of the greatest, wisest, and most powerful humans who have ever lived

This section is describing Nature

All in one mighty sepulcher. The hills
Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun; the vales
Stretching in pensive quietness between;
The venerable woods—rivers that move *40*
In majesty, and the complaining brooks
That make the meadows green; and, poured round all,
Old Ocean's gray and melancholy waste,—
Are but the solemn decorations all
Of the great tomb of man! The golden sun, *45*

What are the tombs?

This section is describing Nature

All in one mighty sepulcher. The hills
Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun; the vales
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Are but the solemn decorations all
Of the great tomb of man! The golden sun, *45*

What are the tombs? Hills, vales, woods, rivers, brooks, meadows, ocean

Of the great tomb of man! The golden sun, *45*
The planets, all the infinite host of heaven,
Are shining on the sad abodes of death,
Through the still lapse of ages. **All that tread**
The globe are but a handful to the tribes
That slumber in its bosom.—Take the wings *50*
Of morning, pierce the Barcan wilderness,
Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound,
Save his own dashings,—yet the dead are there:
And millions in those solitudes, since first *55*
The flight of years began, have laid them down
In their last sleep—the dead reign there alone.

What does this mean?

Where are the dead?

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The planets, all the infinite host of heaven,
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And millions in those solitudes, since first
The flight of years began, have laid them down
In their last sleep—the dead reign there alone.

What does this mean? All the people who are living are nothing in comparison to those who are dead – more people dead than living

Where are the dead?
Everywhere – Barcan, Oregon, etc.

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So shalt thou rest; and what if thou withdraw
In silence from the living, and no friend
Take note of thy departure? All that breathe
Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh
When thou art gone, the solemn brood of care
Plod on, and each one as before will chase
His favorite phantom; yet all these shall leave
Their mirth and their employments, and shall come *65*
And make their bed with thee. As the long train

What fear is Nature speaking about?

How does Nature comfort the reader?

What does this mean?

So shalt thou rest; and what if thou withdraw
In silence from the living, and no friend
Take note of thy departure? All that breathe
Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh
When thou art gone, the solemn brood of care
Plod on, and each one as before will chase
His favorite phantom; yet all these shall leave
Their mirth and their employments, and shall come 65
And make their bed with thee. As the long train

What fear is Nature speaking about? Fear of dying alone and being forgotten

How does Nature comfort the reader? Everyone will suffer a similar fate

What does this mean? Everyone will go about their lives, but will eventually share the same fate

*Nature is still speaking

And make their bed with thee. As the long train
Of ages glide away, the sons of men,
The youth in life's green spring, and he who goes
In the full strength of years, matron and maid,
The speechless babe, and the gray-headed man—*70*
Shall one by one be gathered to thy side
By those, who in their turn shall follow them.

What do they all have in common?

*Nature is still speaking

And make their bed with thee. As the long train
Of ages glide away, the sons of men,
The youth in life's green spring, and he who goes
In the full strength of years, matron and maid,
The speechless babe, and the gray-headed man—*70*
Shall one by one be gathered to thy side
By those, who in their turn shall follow them.

What do they all have in common?

The young, the middle aged, the old, will die (death is an equal opportunity employer)

Narration shifts back to speaker's voice

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take *75*
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch *80*
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

What is the final thought from the speaker?

Comparing dying to _____?

Narration shifts back to speaker's voice

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take *75*
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By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch *80*
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

Comparing dying to sleep

What is the final thought from the speaker? Death is peaceful; when it is your turn to die and join the others, don't be afraid, it is a comforting place—become one with it

Lessons

- Earth nourished us and will reclaim us
- Do not go alone – reunited with all that go before us
- Endless cycle (birth – growth – re-birth)
- Death is a natural part of life (theme)